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# 097 - The Magnificat

Salvatore Garofalo

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# MARIAN LIBRARY STUDIES



**Msgr. Salvatore Garofalo**  
**THE MAGNIFICAT**

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## About the article and its author . . .

When Mary uttered her Magnificat, she praised God not just for the marvels He had accomplished for her personally. It was for the ineffable gifts destined for all men that she voiced her gratitude. He who is mighty was going to fulfill His promises to Israel. He was actually inaugurating the very work of man's salvation. Mary's jubilant song of triumph is then not hers alone. It is a joyous hymn that all the faithful are to sing with her. Are we not all of that true Israel, the servant to whom God has shown mercy? Should not our soul rejoice because of the great things God has done for us? It is this aspect of the Magnificat to which the author of the present commentary chiefly draws our attention. Copious references to passages throughout all of Scripture help us to understand how the canticle is in very fact an act of thanksgiving to God for His fidelity in bringing about the redemption of mankind.

Msgr. Salvatore Garofalo, the author of this study, was born in Torre del Greco in 1911. A doctor in both theology (Lateran University) and in Scripture (Pontifical Biblical Institute), he has written quite extensively particularly on Biblical subjects. Among his books may be mentioned the following: *Il Salterio del Pellegrino* (1950), *Il Libro dei Rei* (1951), *Dall Evangelio agli Evangelii* (1953), *Gesu Magistro* (1954). Two of his works deal with the Blessed Virgin. One of these, *La Madonna della Bibbia*, was recently published by Bruce as *Mary in the Bible*. The work from which our study is taken, *Parole di Maria*, was published by Mercier Press under the title *The Words of Mary*. One of Monsignor's most important contributions to Biblical scholarship is his present work as director of the first great Italian commentary on the Bible.

A professor of exegesis at the Pontifical Urban University of Rome, Msgr. Garofalo also holds a number of positions in various ecclesiastical bodies. He is a qualificador of the Congregation of the Holy Office, and a consultor of the Congregations of the Council and of the Propaganda Fide as well as of the Pontifical Commission for Biblical Studies. He also served as Rector Magnificent for the Scientific Missionary Institute of Propaganda of the Pontifical University of Propaganda Fide.

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of remote generations, but she spoke of them as things now realised. The joyful humility in her words gave the tone to new canticles.

Mary revealed in the Magnificat a particular familiarity with the Psalms. The praises and invocations of these magnificent prayers inspired by God were, and still are in the official prayers of the Church, solid food of real piety. It was on these that Mary had nourished her soul, and they came spontaneously to her mind.

Among the other ancient hymns, the Blessed Virgin meditated with special interest on the canticle which Anna, the mother of Samuel, sang to the Lord in thanksgiving for the gift of fertility after long expectation and many tears.<sup>4</sup>

When the son of the miracle was weaned and carried to the Tabernacle, the happy mother sang thus to the Lord:

My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord<sup>5</sup>, and my horn is exalted in my God: my mouth is enlarged over my enemies: because I have joyed in thy salvation.

There is none holy as the Lord is: for there is no other beside thee, and there is none strong like our God.<sup>6</sup>

Do not multiply to speak lofty things, boasting: let old matters depart from your mouth: for the Lord is a God of all knowledge, and to Him are thoughts prepared.

The bow of the mighty is overcome, and the weak are girt with strength.<sup>7</sup>

They that were full before have hired out themselves for bread:<sup>8</sup> and the hungry are filled, so that the barren hath borne many:<sup>9</sup> and she that hath many children is weakened.

The Lord killeth and maketh alive, he bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again.

The Lord maketh poor and rich,<sup>8</sup> he humbleth and he exalteth.

He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dunghill: that he may sit with princes, and hold the throne of glory.<sup>7</sup> For the poles of the earth are the Lord's, and upon them he hath set the world.

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, because no man shall prevail by his own strength.

The adversaries of the Lord shall fear him: and upon them he shall thunder in the heavens: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth and he shall give empire to his king, and shall exalt the horn of his Christ.

It could not be that the humble and highly sensitive soul of Mary would not appreciate the moving hymn which exalts the power and mercy of

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God, His preference for the humble, His severity towards the proud and, finally, the glory of the future Messias.

During her journey across the plain of Esdrelon, the mountains of Samaria and the territory of Judea, famous places in the history of her people succeeded each other before her eyes. Their names reminded her of tempestuous events and prodigious interventions of God which pointed the way for Israel and mankind towards the Messiah, towards her Son.

The Magnificat is not a cold elaboration, a laboriously exact composition by a professional versifier.

The faculty of improvising songs in particular circumstances is a characteristic of Semitic people. The surge of joy, exaltation or gratitude found its natural expression in a spontaneous hymn. Jewish poetry does not have iron laws which smother poetic enthusiasm; the fundamental and elementary rule, which consists in balancing the ideas between the two parts of the verse, allows, especially to those familiar with other poetic texts, similar songs to be improvised with ease. Women have a particular aptitude for this. The ancient examples of Anna, of the prophetess Deborah<sup>10</sup> and Judith<sup>11</sup> are famous, and may be compared with those which occur today among Arabic tribes.

Moreover, spiritual writers teach, and a long series of examples supports their teaching, that when the soul reaches certain heights in the degrees of mysticism, its ideas and sentiments can be expressed only in the exalted language of poetry.

St. Paul speaks of canticles and hymns which the Christians were to sing, not only repeating Psalms and hymns which they knew but also abandoning themselves to the Holy Ghost in order to compose new ones.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to a gift for improvisation, the Semites are noted for the ease with which they can retain a text, even a lengthy text, after hearing it once, without having to refresh their memories by glancing at the script. Certainly, the Blessed Virgin sang this canticle again and again. Her gratitude for what the Lord deigned to complete in her did not lessen, but grew greater and greater. To the wonder of the conception of Jesus, were added the prodigies of His Nativity, His hidden life and His ministry.

The dust of the commonplace can dim the mysteries of God only for the indifferent, who are no longer moved by the daily miracle of the life which shines forth in the beauty of a flower, in the smile of a child.

A man without enthusiasm is to be pitied. He is alive but he does not know he is already dead. Enthusiasm is the oxygen of our interior life. It is the constant temperature of a soul which is aware of the things it believes, desires and knows as the source of its hopes; a soul which wants, in other words, to live beyond the morass of mediocrity. Indifference is an icy veil which hides all beauty from the eyes; it is an implacable malady which kills the taste for human and divine things.

There was never a more enthusiastic person than Mary, and it is not without reason that the richest manifestation of her spirit was an outburst of poetry. . . .

The Magnificat begins with a cry of praise:

My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.<sup>13</sup>

The word "magnify" translates a Greek word which means "to proclaim loudly." In virtue of the law of parallelism of which we spoke above, the two parts of the verse express only one idea: "all my being exults with joy praising the greatness of God which works salvation."

The abrupt "hath rejoiced" in the past tense — aorist in Greek — instead of the present seems to carry us in thought to the moment of the Annunciation. When the Angel spoke to her, the Blessed Virgin showed a great joy which she knew how to bury in her silence; but now that Elizabeth exalted her, she transformed at once the words spoken in her honour into a homage of praise and gratitude to the Lord from whom she knew she received everything.

The Magnificat is the fruit of intense meditation, contemplation, prayer and humility.

Few know how to taste the pure and spiritual joy of praising God. Too many think of prayer only as a request — even a petulant demand — for favours often restricted to the narrow limits of the earthly goods. God created us "unto the praise of the glory of his grace,"<sup>14</sup> to exalt His Majesty, His Omnipotence, His Mercy and His Love which created and rules all things for His glory.

It is true that we are as nothing before God; yet we must not forego our duty and our privilege of exalting His greatness, forgetting our concern for our paltry needs.

Jesus, before teaching us to ask for our daily bread, taught us to say to the Father: "Hallowed be Thy name,"<sup>15</sup> that is, may your glory and sanctity be known.

Few are so generous as to prostrate themselves before the All Highest with the joyful cries of the Seraphim which Isaiah saw around His throne: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of his glory."<sup>16</sup>

The motive of Mary's exultation was to have the Lord "regard" her:

Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is His name.<sup>17</sup>

Phrase answers harmoniously to phrase, within the delicate framework of the verse: on the one hand, "the humility of the handmaid" and, on



the other, "He that is mighty;" on the one hand, the blessedness of Mary, and, on the other, the holiness of God which is the cause of her blessedness.

Mary does not make a panegyric of her virtue, of her humility, but she limits herself to declaring the "humility" of a creature which the Lord lifted to the summit of glory. It is always the voice of Her who said to the Angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

To appreciate the humility of Mary, one should contrast it with the empty pride of a woman who thinks herself superior to another. In answer to Elizabeth's eulogy: "Blessed art thou amongst women," she replied by showing her "humility."

Replying to the "Blessed" of Elizabeth's greeting, Mary spoke of her own lowliness, but declared how God showed benevolence towards her, conferring upon her a dignity for which all men would proclaim her happy. Thus, the praises were not to be referred to her, but to Him who deigned to work such a wonder in her.

And what a wonder! Chosen from eternity for the supreme dignity of the Mother of God, free from original sin, Mary unites in herself the splendors of an incorrupt and incorruptible purity, and the unique glory of divine maternity.

She became the living monstrosity of God, carrying in her womb the Son of the Most High, who through a miracle of love took the form of a man, of a servant.

Beloved by God more than other creatures, earthly or celestial, she was enriched with every grace and privilege in the greatest measure. She was inferior only to Christ who was her God but also her Son.

Mary took Elizabeth's praise, directed it to God, and viewing in a prophetic light, she saw in the centuries the endless procession of human generations which would never tire of admiring what God had wrought in her.

If a man does not admire and praise Mary, he despises his mind and allows his heart to shrivel. He is created to soar as an eagle, but he burrows like a mole; for, not knowing the greatness of Mary, he cannot know the greatness in himself.

The humble and the poor see in Mary the triumph of humility and poverty. The learned contemplate and admire in her the summit of greatness and of all wonders.

Through her, the prodigal finds the road home; and the son who has remained faithful to the house of his Father, knows that he has a Mother in Her.

A voice was once raised to glorify Mary, reaching back to the very moment of Christ's birth.

One day, when Jesus demolished a vile calumny of the Scribes and Pharisees with the cogency of His inexorable logic and the power of His

majestic eloquence, a woman's voice arose from the throng which listened to the Master: "Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck." Moved by Jesus' words, the poor woman, pleased at the triumph of His wisdom, praised, with the delicate instinct of a woman, the mother of such a son.

Jesus listened to this voice, lifted up in the silence created by the frustrated wrath of his enemies and the dumb admiration of the crowd, and replied: "Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."<sup>18</sup>

Jesus did not refuse to accept the eulogy of the woman, but confirmed it and suggested where, in a higher sphere which was not the simple relationship of mother to son, one must seek and find the greatness of His mother.

Mary deserves to be praised because, more than any other creature, she knew how to hear God's words and to keep them, how to hear them in a spirit of obedience and humility and keep them in a spirit of complete oblation.

Her greatness is not the sort that only makes one marvel; it is a greatness built on daily self-sacrifice which makes one think and encourages one to imitate it.

And his mercy is from generation unto generation, to them that fear Him.<sup>19</sup>

This verse is the prelude to those which follow.

Mary declared that the mercy shown by God to her, in the mystery of the Incarnation, reached forward into the future, to all the people who would draw benefit from the Redemption and thus become the object of divine, generous mercy, although they know, with humility, their position of redeemed creatures, and "fear," that is to say, adore God with profound respect, trying hard not to offend Him.

Had Mary a clear perception of the consequences the incarnation of the Word in her womb would have for all time and for all men? At least, every hour of her day was occupied with the contemplation of the great work of God.

She saw truth and grace sweeping beyond the limits of her country and her people, and already into the whole world wherever there is a shadow to dispell, darkness to sunder, or misery needing mercy.

Mary is a seed of joy which fertilises an arid and ungrateful world. Sorrow and misery, our numberless blind and groping desires, our injustices and vileness, our power and our pride are the sources of our sadness and our affliction; and, in her humility, Mary shows us the spring of joy and of peace.

The Blessed Virgin not only cast a look at the future, but reflected on the past, drawing out the constant pattern of divine action throughout human history in preparing for the coming of her Son:



He hath shewed might in his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.<sup>20</sup>

The irresistible power of God – the “arm” according to the Hebrew idiom – revealed itself throughout the centuries in the humiliation of the proud crushed by Him under the weight of their insolence, in “the conceit of their heart” – the “heart” meant the intellect to the Jews – in their various designs. He has shown up the stupidity of the wisdom of the world.<sup>21</sup>

Man is abandoned to build in the image of his own absurd designs. The tremendous punishment inflicted on the pride of his first father did not cure him of the insane wish to put himself up against God.

Which of us has not at least once blamed God because He is not just, because He has not acted on our design and has not helped us when and how we wanted?

We suggest the way and forget that He Himself has said:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways my ways. . . ,  
For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways  
exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts.<sup>22</sup>

Or, at least, we claimed that we had the right to lay down the path our life was to follow, preferring it to His way. And thus –

We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known.

What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us?

All these things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on.

And as a ship that passeth through the waves: whereof when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters.

Or as when a bird flieth through the air, the passage of which no mark can be found, but only the sound of the wings beating the light air, and parting it by the force of her flight, she moved her wings, and hath flown through, and there is no mark found afterwards of her way:

Or as when an arrow is shot at a mark, the divided air presently cometh together again, so that the passage thereof is not known.<sup>23</sup>

We find ourselves suffocated by the absence of freedom because Christ has commanded:

Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat.

How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!<sup>24</sup>

Air, air! We have insisted that our spirit needed room – room for its good and its bad energies; we claimed that nothing and nobody should oppose our wishes. We have flexed our arms; and we have found ourselves on the wide path like pitiful, frightened sparrows. We are witless and we have a heart of stone.

In Mary's words there is a particular allusion to the vain pride of men who dare to judge the work of God *par excellence*, the Incarnation of the Word. Who ever thought that the Son of the Most High would become flesh in the womb of a poor, little creature, like all the sons of men; would live unknown as a boy in the exercise of an occupation among the lowliest; would be misunderstood and persecuted as an adult, and, finally, die on an infamous gibbet?

All this is a scandal and foolishness to the limited human intelligence. Behold how the "proud" judged Christ:

How came this man by this wisdom and miracles?

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?<sup>25</sup>

Is not this JESUS the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then saith he, I came down from heaven.<sup>26</sup>

He casteth out devils, by Beelzebub the prince of devils.<sup>27</sup>

This man is not of God, who keepeth not the Sabbath.<sup>28</sup>

If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you.<sup>29</sup>

Crucify him, crucify him . . . We have a law, and according to the law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.<sup>30</sup>

Sir, we have remembered, that that seducer said, while he was yet alive: After three days I will rise again.<sup>31</sup>

And here is the answer of God:

Christ Jesus . . .

Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery, to be equal with God.

But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.

He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death! even to the death of the cross.

For which cause God also exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names:

That in the name of JESUS every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

And that every tongue should confess that the Lord JESUS CHRIST is in the glory of God the Father.<sup>32</sup>

The humbled has been exalted, the judged has become the judge. The persecuted and oppressed man has been revealed as God in the splendour of His greatness and His universal domination.

• • •

He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.<sup>33</sup>

In the two parts of the verse, perfectly parallel, the Blessed Virgin expresses vividly an idea common in the Old Testament: the reversal that God effects in the history of men who trust to their own pride and power to gain laboriously a momentary pre-eminence. A person who has reached the plane of the social scale is so infatuated by his greatness as to press it upon those of his fellow-creatures less favoured by fortune or too respectful of the rights of God and of others to construct their own throne on the ruins of justice.

The idea, which one finds also in Anna's canticle in a more general form, is expressed here in a concrete and dramatic fashion.

The history of Israel is full of examples of ill-advised kings and princes who, drunk with earthly glory, betrayed God, and were dethroned by Him; and of obscure but virtuous men and women who unexpectedly shone in restoring the desecrated throne. Humility, concealment, in a word, is a state of inferiority, which, in the eyes of those who measure it by the yardstick of time and of human gain, is considered to be abasement and pusillanimity; but in the eyes of God, is a practice of virtue to which is always annexed a corresponding exaltation.

Man's yardstick is not God's, and true greatness is not synonymous with worldly rank and specious appearances.

Human artifice crumbles before the eyes of God who reads the hearts of men and knows them better than they think they know themselves.

You are they who justify themselves before men, but God knoweth thy hearts; for that which is high to men, is an abomination before God.<sup>34</sup>

• • •

He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.<sup>35</sup>



In the two parallel parts of this verse, the order of the preceding verse is elegantly reversed: first the hungry, then the rich; whereas in the other the humble were mentioned after the powerful.

The thought here refers to the customs of kings and princes, especially Eastern ones.

It was customary for him who presented himself at the court of another sovereign on a visit of homage or friendship, to present gifts precious in proportion to the renown and degree of the visited and visitor.

When the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, famous for his wisdom throughout the East, she entered Jerusalem "with a great train, and riches, and camels that carried spices, and an immense quantity of gold, and precious stones." Returning to her own land, she had from the king of Israel "all that she desired and asked from him, besides what he freely offered her as a gesture of his royal bounty."<sup>36</sup>

Whoever received such gifts made it a duty and an honour to give gifts and largesse in return; and whoever could not offer gifts would not dare to hope to receive them.

God, on the other hand, sends away empty-handed from his presence and house those who claim to receive because they think that they have given, while He joyfully receives and fills with gifts those who do not rejoice in material prosperity and are, for that reason, worthy to receive the precious gifts of God with full appreciation and gratitude.

In this context, these gifts are evidently Messianic, the abundance of riches and spiritual benefits which cannot be appraised by those, who, made heavy by their material satiety, have obtuse minds and hearts so sluggish that they cannot aspire to higher things. Already the prophet announced that the Messiah had founded a kingdom of the disinherited, the starved, the humble; and Jesus made use of his words to promulgate the kingdom of the reign of God, when He commented on them in the Nazareth synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me: he hath sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, and to preach a release to the captive, and deliverance to them that are shut up.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God: to comfort all that mourn.<sup>37</sup>

'This day is fulfilled this scripture in your ears' said the Master to his compatriots,<sup>38</sup> and on the Mount of the Beatitudes he proclaimed: 'Blessed are ye that hunger now: for you shall be filled. . . . Woe to you that are filled: for you shall hunger.'<sup>39</sup>

The satiated are those who limit their horizon to earthly pleasure. This earth is a vale of tears, and the satiated can but lament, since they have made this exile their *patria*. Their homeland is limited to a dining-

room, and they do not think that the soul can hunger and thirst: "hunger and thirst after justice"<sup>40</sup> — after the ideal of goodness and perfection.

This hunger and thirst could be extinguished only by grace: "But the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting."<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, the tremendous day of hunger would come for those whose symbol of prosperity is a full stomach:

Behold the days come, saith the Lord, and I will send forth a famine into the land: not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.<sup>42</sup>

So no drug could cheat this hunger and no muddy water of "broken cisterns"<sup>43</sup> could slake this implacable thirst.

Then the desolate spiritual void of the soul would open itself before the eyes of the "satiated," frightened by the abyss.

One could be ironic, could smile with superiority before formidable spiritual problems and could deny their necessity; but when God lays bare our wretchedness, makes the pasture grass barren and dries the throat, then those problems arise in all their gravity and, at length, they come home to the exhausted and dulled soul which sinks beneath them.

The parable of the rich glutton is not only among the most picturesque but among the most severe of the Gospel:

There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen; and feasted sumptuously every day.

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who lay at his gate, full of sores.

Desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom;<sup>44</sup> And the rich man died; and he was buried in hell.

And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom:

And he cried, and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.

And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.<sup>45</sup>

Who will save this insatiably greedy man from God's wrath?

They are become great and enriched, They are grown gross and fat. . . . Shall I not visit for these things, said the Lord? or shall not my soul take revenge on such a nation?<sup>46</sup>

Neither the upheavals of the world nor the wilfulness of men should frighten or lay waste the soul which can live happily. Our happiness is in knowing that our God is omnipotent, holy, merciful, rich and a Father; that He loves us and that our soul can finally satiate itself and satisfy the anxious desire for greatness which agitates it in Him and through Him. Riches are not those possessed materially and bound up with a passing world; wealth is that which changes us in the profound depth of our souls and which slakes our thirst for eternal life and happiness.

• • •

He hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.<sup>47</sup>

The Magnificat concludes with an open Messianic affirmation, with a clear statement that whatever God promised to the ancients for their salvation was now fulfilled.

As shown by reading the Bible, the economy of the Redemption, announced to the first man for all humanity descended from him, passed in its historical realization through successive phases which restricted it provisionally to a chosen section of men spread over all the earth, without, however excluding the others.<sup>48</sup>

Noah announced that the divine benediction was on his son Sem, but he associated with Japeth, the head of the family of Indo-European pagan people,<sup>49</sup> who lived in the "tents of Sem."<sup>50</sup>

About two thousand years before Jesus, God chose Abraham of the house of Sem, and made a covenant promising him a land, numerous posterity, His benediction as a token of every divine favor and, above all, the great gift of liberator.<sup>51</sup> One ought, however, to extend the divine benediction to all men, to all peoples, who receive their faith from Abraham and are blessed in Abraham.<sup>52</sup> Through Isaac, the chosen son of the patriarch, the benediction was concentrated on Jacob whom "tribes worship,<sup>53</sup> and Jacob announced to his son Juda that the sceptre should not be taken from his tribe "until he come that is to be sent, and he shall be the expectation of nations."<sup>54</sup>

In the fifteenth century before the coming of Jesus, Moses marked a decisive stage in the history of the revelation.

By order and with the omnipotent help of God, he led the descendants of Abraham and heirs of his promise, oppressed by Pharaoh, out of the land of Egypt. At the feet of Sinai he constituted and organized them



into a people with their own legislation and a well-defined purpose, and united them to God by a solemn covenant.

Individuals dispersed among a whole community find it difficult to keep the true faith and to keep alive the memory and hope of the divine promises; on the other hand, if the divine benediction concentrates itself on one small nation, a covenant becomes almost a necessity because of the general spread of human evil.

In the time of David – tenth to ninth century before Christ – when the chosen people reached the peak of its splendor, the harpist king, poet and prophet, received from God the promise of an eternal throne which was to be realized in the Messiah, the most illustrious of his descendants; and the king, contemplating this his descendant in the glory of His divinity, His royalty and His priesthood, saw Him also in the humiliation of His unutterable Passion: persecuted, scorned and wounded, but liberator and purifier of all people by the shedding of His blood.

During the following centuries of Israel's history, the prophets kept alive the promise of God and specified the conditions of the expectations with further revelations.

In prosperous and adverse events, the expectation of the Messiah was Israel's leaven, their glory when they were faithful and their condemnation when they betrayed it.

During the long centuries of the preparation of humanity for the coming of the Redeemer, God showed particular affection and gave special help to the people of Israel. He did so because they could the more easily keep and transmit to all their brothers the carefully guarded treasure of the true faith and the precious heritage of the divine promises of restoration and happiness.

Jesus, son of God and son of Man, would carry out the Father's Will for universal redemption, and the thousand year expectation of the chosen people and of humanity.

During long centuries God had prepared the people of Israel, with particular immediate interventions and through the ministry of His interpreters, and through them all humanity, for the expectation of the liberator. God had therefore to provide, for this specially prepared and endowed people, irrefutable proofs of divine faithfulness to promises undertaken with the patriarchs; and all men read in the history of this people – an epic, tragic, lyrical, idyllic history of light and shade, heroism and vileness – the history of the love of God Who had used the most opportune means to give again to humanity the hope and joy of reconciliation with its Creator.

Thus it is that Jesus is called the son of Abraham,<sup>55</sup> heir of David's throne,<sup>56</sup> come – as His mother sings – to succour Israel according to the ancient promise, to save His people according to the covenant made with Abraham.

22. Isaias, LV, 8-9.
23. Wisdom, V, 7-12.
24. Matthew, VII, 13 seq.
25. Matthew, XIII, 54-55.
26. John, VI, 42.
27. Luke, XI, 15.
28. John, IX, 16.
29. John, XVIII, 3-. The words of these last three texts were spoken by the Jews to Pilate.
30. John, XIX, 6-7.
31. Matthew, XXVII, 63.
32. Epistle to the Philippians, 11, 6-11.
33. Parallel Biblical texts: '(God) setteth up the humble on high, and comforteth with health those that mourn,' Job, V, 11; '(He) overthroweth nobles,' idem XII, 19. 'The Lord lifteth up the meek: and he bringeth the wicked down even to the ground,' Psalms, CXLVI, 6; 'God hath overturned the thrones of proud princes, and hath set up the meek in their stead,' Ecclesiasticus, X, 17.
34. Luke, XVI, 15.
35. Cf. Biblical texts: 'The rich have wanted, and have suffered hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good,' Psalms, XXXIII, 11; '(God) hath satisfied the empty soul, and hath filled the hungry soul with good things,' Psalms, CVI, 9; 'Thus saith the Lord God: Behold my servants shall eat, and you shall be hungry: behold my servants shall drink, and you shall be thirsty,' Isaias, LXV, 13.
36. III Kings, X, 2, 13.
37. Isaias, LXI, 1-2.
38. Luke, IV, 14-21.
39. Luke, VI, 21, 25.
40. Matthew, V, 6.
41. John, IV, 14.
42. Amos, VIII, 11.
43. Jeremias, 11, 13.
44. That is in the place of happiness.
45. Luke, XVI, 19-25.
46. Jeremias, V, 27-29.
47. These verses, which allude to thousands of years of history and thought, are inspired by very many texts of Holy Scripture. We choose some from the poets: '(God) shewing mercy to David his anointed: and to his seed for ever,' Psalms, XVII, 51; '(God) hath remembered his covenant for ever: the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which he made to Abraham; and his oath to Isaac: — and he appointed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting testament,' Psalms, CIV, 8-10; 'Who is a God like to thee.... Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham; which thou hast sworn to our father from the days of old,' Micheas, VII, 18, 20.
48. Genesis, III, 15.
49. Genesis, X, 2-5.
50. Genesis, IX, 27.
51. Genesis, XVII, 1-14.
52. Genesis, XVII, 3; XVII, 18; XXVIII, 18.
53. Genesis, XXVII, 29.
54. Genesis, XLIX, 10.
55. Matthew, 1, 1.
56. Luke, 1, 32 seq.
57. Epistle to the Galatians, IV, 28. St. Paul develops this doctrine in chapter IV of his epistle to the Romans and in chapters III-IV of his Epistle to the Galatians.
58. St. Grignon de Montfort, *Tract on the true devotion to the Virgin Mary*, version of P.C. Bonicelli, Rome, 1942, n.225.

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